DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 895 IR 052 858

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TITLE Dewey Decimal Classification for U. S. Conn: An Advantage?
PUB DATE 31 Jan 88
NOTE 17p.; Best copy available.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Libraries; *Cataloging; *Classification; Higher Education; Indexing; Library Automation; Library Collections; Library Research; *Library Technical Processes; Online Searching
IDENTIFIERS *Dewey Decimal Classification; Library of Congress Classification; *Reclassification

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system at the U. S. Conn Library at Wayne State College (WSC) in Nebraska. Several developments in the last 20 years which have eliminated the trend toward reclassification of academic library collections from DDC to the Library of Congress (LC) classification scheme are considered: LC has proven to be less than perfect for academic collections; LC now assigns both DDC and LC call numbers; and even items already assigned a classification number require the attention of library staff. The following questions are then addressed: (1) What things need to be considered when deciding whether to reclassify a collection? (2) What are the current size recommendations for using the LC system? (3) What percentage of books added to the WSC collection have LC and/or DDC numbers available? and (4) What would the costs be to reclassify the WSC collection and how would automation change the costs? It is concluded that WSC should not reclassify its collection at this time. The potential of DDC as an online search tool providing subject access to the collection is discussed. (17 references) (MES)

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DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION FOR U. S. CONN:

AN ADVANTAGE?

Research Report
Submitted to Dr. Jack Middendorf
January 31, 1988

by
Kate Marek

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DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION FOR U. S. CONN:

AN ADVANTAGE?

Every institution or organization should periodically address some serious questions. Where have we been? Where are we headed? What has worked for us, and what could work better? Where would we like to be in ten years, and how can we get to that point? The purpose of this study is to examine the classification scheme currently in use at the U. S. Conn Library of Wayne State College, and to apply these questions to that study.

There are many dimensions to our service at U. S. Conn. Classification theory is an integral aspect of the field of librarianship. Other subdivisions are reference, acquisitions, administration, and circulation. To examine any of these topics is to examine an aspect of librarianship, and therefore, to study the ultimate purpose of any individual library.

Our theory is that the U. S. Conn Library's purpose is to purchase, store, and make readily available materials important to the education and research needs of the Wayne State College students and faculty. In addition, we provide access to materials to community members and to area high school and public libraries.

Does our classification scheme coordinate well with our institutional goals? Will that scheme, the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC), continue to work for us as we consider the next decade of service? Would a shift to a different classification scheme, namely Library of Congress Classification (LCC), enable us to better serve our patrons?

Reclassification of academic library collections from DDC to LCC was a trend in the late 1960's and early 1970's. The assumption was that, as technology for libraries was being developed, a national classification scheme would enhance the cooperative borrowing that was also developing. Library of Congress Classification was chosen, not as the most perfect scheme for academic libraries, but simply because it originated from our national library. With LC classification numbers provided by this central unit, it was presumed that the cataloging operations of individual libraries would be greatly streamlined. Catalogers could accept the class numbers as assigned by the Library of Congress without question, thereby saving professional time and freeing those catalogers for various other operations.

However, several developments in the last twenty years have eliminated the trend toward switching classification systems.

First, Library of Congress Classification itself has proven to be less than perfect for academic collections. By nature this classification system is often confusing and difficult for both catalogers and patrons. This is not to say that LC Classification is poorly structured; rather, that neither Dewey nor LCC (nor any other classification system) can be argued to be a perfect scheme for any library.

Secondly, even more Library of Congress cataloging information has become available through the availability of MARC records. At the U. S. Conn Library, we access MARC records through OCLC. Many of those records are originated through or verified by the Library of Congress. If this is the case, the Library of Congress assigns both LCC numbers and DDC numbers. Twenty years ago, the argument for reclassification emphasized the time saved by using Library of Congress assigned classification numbers available on LC

cards. Since the Library of Congress now assigns numbers from both LCC and DDC systems, this argument is outdated.

Indeed, the Library of Congress is active in its push to provide as many verified records as possible. In 1985, for example, LC added 74,000 audio-visual records to the MARC bank. The Library of Congress has a great deal of interest in assigning DDC numbers to MARC records. The Dewey Decimal Classification system is widely used in Western Europe, and particularly in Great Britain. Our Library of Congress stresses the importance of international library cooperation. This emphasis and its concurrent interest in DDC will undoubtedly increase with advancing technology.

The third shift in thinking away from reclassification has developed from a more rational and objective trend in thought. In the late 1960's, the mood was so very pro-reclassification that many libraries glossed over the real nuts-and-bolts purpose of classification. Centrally assigned numbers sounded great when the dawning of automation pointed toward uniformity and one centrally assigned Library of Congress Classification number for each item. But this reasoning was never complete. Classification exists to group like materials together and to provide each item a unique and retrievable spot within a collection. U. S. Conn is a collection within itself, serving our Wayne State College patrons and our community. The Library of Congress may assign a book a particular classification number, but each item we receive must be modified to fit into our unique collection. This requires the attention of the cataloging staff for each item.

This is not to minimize the importance of OCLC and the suggested Dewey numbers available to our cataloging staff. These suggested numbers are a tremendous benefit and time saver. However, we access suggested Dewey

numbers as often as we would be able to access Library of Congress suggested numbers (see page 7). Then, each number is checked and adapted to fit into our unique collection.

It is appropriate at this point to address four specific questions suggested for this study.

1. What things need to be considered when deciding whether to reclassify a collection?

The choice of whether to reclassify a library collection from one scheme to another is very different from the original question of which classification scheme to choose. When the collection is new, careful research into classification theory is required. Schemes must be balanced against the ultimate goals of the institution, projected size of the collection, subject specialities, continuity with other similar libraries, and so on.

When looking at an established collection, however, the questions addressed are very different. When facing the possibility of recataloging every volume in the library collection (160,000 for U. S. Conn), the basic issue is this: Does our present system work well for us? If the cataloging operation is effective and efficient, it is inappropriate to consider a change. To use a cliche, "if it's not broken, don't fix it."

If it is proven, however, that there are major problems in the service of the library caused by a poor classification system, other considerations may be appropriate within the context of a reclassification discussion. What system would serve the institution better? How much better would that system work? How much would a change cost, and would that cost justify the resulting improvement in service? What interruptions in service would the

reclassification project cause? What exactly is the motive for the change? And, what long range benefits can the library hope to reap from a change in classification scheme?

In an analysis of how the Dewey Decimal Classification system is working for the U. S. Conn Library, several variables can be considered. For instance, is there a cataloging backlog? A bottleneck in processing might be due to a difficult classification scheme. Our cataloging flow, however, is smooth and timely. There is no evidence of a problem in this area.

Another issue is patron usability. Are the numbers found on the catalog cards easy to understand and easy to locate on the shelf? Certainly our use of DDC provides an advantage to our WSC patrons. Most students, faculty, and community members come to our facility with a knowledge of the Dewey Decimal System. Indeed, most of our patrons feel more comfortable using a familiar system.

Staff usability is also important. The logical and hierarchical structure of Dewey enables our professional staff to keep a better mental picture of the collection, thereby enhancing service to patrons. In addition, the cataloging staff is familiar with Dewey. A change to LCC would require learning a new system, and years of practice to perfect its application.

By using the Dewey Decimal System, U. S. Conn makes our collection more accessible to area libraries. Service to area public and high school libraries is an integral part of our work.

Is the DDC expandable for our future needs? Is the classification scheme supported by a reputable organization? These questions are addressed next.

2. What are the current size recommendations for using the Library of Congress Classification System?

The American Library Association currently makes no recommendations for choice of classification system based on size of the collection. According to Karen Muller, Executive Director of the Resources and Technical Services Division of ALA, "It makes no difference which scheme is used as long as it is kept current and maintained." (Attachment 1)

While most large university libraries in the United States do use LCC, the University of Illinois at Urbana is an example of one that does not. The administration there analyzed the benefits and drawbacks of reclassifying their 6,000,000 volume collection from DDC to LCC. The decision at Illinois fifteen years ago was to remain with Dewey. DDC has proven to be feasible for any size collection.

Both the Library of Congress Classification scheme and the Dewey Decimal Classification are supported by long standing organizations which guarantee the continued support and durability of their systems. Twenty years ago the argument was that Dewey was less up to date than the Library of Congress system. However, Dewey has since published two full revisions (the 18th and 19th) and has also established "phoenix" schedules. These phoenix schedules are individual class divisions for quickly advancing fields, such as computer science, which are updated individually and issued in paperback form.

3. What percentage of books added to the WSC collection have LC call numbers available? What percentage of books added to the WSC collection have Dewey call numbers available?

The accessibility of previously assigned call numbers for materials added to the WSC collection depends on what is available to us through OCLC,

or what has been added to the MARC tapes. Since we use OCLC for cataloging, the procedure is to access the record through that system. If the record is found, the next step is to determine whether or not the record was created or subsequently endorsed by the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress is the copyright depository of all domestic works, and catalogs all works which are submitted there. "Cataloging In Publication" is a program whereby precataloging is done in cooperation with publishers, who send in galley proofs of material before it is actually published. Most works published by the major publishing houses in our country are handled this way. The Library of Congress initiated the Cataloging in Publication program in 1972 in an effort to expand uniformity and cooperation. The program has continued to increase over the last fifteen years. LC is currently active in involving the smaller presses in this program. The Library of Congress assigns both LCC numbers and DDC numbers. Therefore, all books that are submitted to the Library of Congress for cataloging receive two classification numbers. Most (at least 80%) of the material added to the WSC collection falls into this category.

The remaining 20% or less of the added material is either on OCLC without Library of Congress verification or is not found in that data base at all. These materials, for us, are usually gift items, very old publications being added to the OCLC database, or are music scores. Some are locally produced video tapes. Since there is no Library of Congress publication data available for this part of our collection, the classification number and all other cataloging information is locally assigned and added to the OCLC database.

Local cataloging will be done for these materials regardless of the

classification scheme used. If WSC converts to the Library of Congress Classification, it will not discernibly change the percentage of material in our collection that requires locally assigned class numbers.

4. What would the costs be to reclassify the WSC collection? Are the costs the same after automation?

Estimating costs for reclassification are difficult. Available per volume cost estimates are very outdated and vary greatly from institution to institution. One way to make a judgment is to simply take a median figure and multiply that by the annual price increases over the last decade. Late 1960's and early 1970's per volume cost estimates range from $0.90 to $3.25. (Attachment 2) Using a 1975 conservative base of $2.00 per volume and increasing that cost by the annual inflation rates found in Table 764 of the Statistical Abstract of the United States (Attachment 3), the $2.00 shifts to $4.38. For the 160,000 volumes in U. S. Conn, then, the conservative cost estimate for reclassification would reach $700,800, or nearly twice our total annual budget.

Certainly the costs would drop dramatically if our catalog were fully automated. Instead of re-tagging materials by typing individual books cards, labels, and pockets, computer generated labels could be affixed to the books. New catalog cards would not be needed if the transfer to an on-line catalog had been completed. If reclassification continues to be an issue at U. S. Conn, our only option is to initiate the project after we are fully automated. It is impossible, though, to estimate these costs without a more complete knowledge of any automated system we install. In addition, there are no estimates available from libraries who have reclassified after having automated their catalog. Fully automated catalogs have only developed over

the past decade, a point past which few libraries undertook reclassification projects.

However, it is not difficult to project that to reclassify each of the 160,000 volumes in the U. S. Conn collection would require a tremendous outlay of staff time and energy, prohibitive funding, and a great deal of upheavyl in the service to patrons.

Tying these four questions together, the paramount issue remains whether a change in classification system would improve our service. And, if so, will any improvement seen justify the cost incurred. Whether our catalog is automated or not, reclassification will be disruptive and expensive. I argue that our present system provides for expedient cataloging and patron access of materials. I cannot recommend a reclassification project for U. S. Conn.

Conclusion

When considering a classification scheme for any library, the purpose of that library must be considered. At U. S. Conn, we are dedicated to serving the students and faculty of Wayne State College. The information we provide to those patrons should support the goals of the college. Wayne State's first priority is its program toward undergraduate degrees. Also important are WSC's Master's programs and faculty research. The material provided by U. S. Conn, and access to that material, should support these institutional priorities.

What classification scheme can best fulfill this goal? The answer must be that no one classification scheme has proven itself to be "best." The classification scheme in and of itself must be seen as part of an overall plan of efficient and effective information storage and retrieval. The Dewey Decimal System can fulfill this purpose very effectively. The issue at this

point in U. S. Conn's history is not the choice of classification scheme. We are not in a position to make an initial decision on this question, and a change at this point would be expensive and time consuming. Rather, the issue is service. How can we maximize our current system to expand our service?

An exciting new dimension to classification theory has developed during the past five years. In 1982, Research Scientist Karen Markey inititated a project exploring the feasibility of the Dewey Decimal System as an on-line search tool. The hierarchical structure of Dewey, along with its extensive index available now on MARC tapes, makes this classification scheme ideal for subject access. Indeed, Dewey was developed as a system for a "classified catalog," or, a catalog arranged by class number rather than by alphabet. This research project was sponsored by OCLC and reports were published in 1986. Briefly, the findings supported the theory that DDC's logical, subject oriented structure has a great potential for on-line subject access.

As the only Nebraska state college with DDC, U. S. Conn is in a position to be a leader in the use of classification as an on-line subject search tool. In addition, the timing is right: with the acquisition of a fully automated system within the immediate future, we can incorporate this function into our program at the outset.

The question, then, becomes not what is the best classification system for academic libraries in general. Most would answer LCC to that question, although many strongly support DDC. But the issue for U. S. Conn is to assess where we are now and how to maximize our current situation. The Dewey We Use classification system is working well for us. We have every reason to believe it will continue to expand with our collection. And, the

possibility of on-line subject access through the use of Dewey numbers and index is exciting. Our challenge is to move forward, to maximize our potential, and to confidently state our advantage.

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

January 26, 1988

Ms. Kate Marek
U.S. Conn Library
Wayne State College
Wayne, NE 68787

Dear Ms. Marek:

Your recent letter to the American Library Association has been forwarded to the Headquarters Library for a reply.

You have asked for recommendations on assessing the viability of the Dewey Decimal System. I have consulted with Karen Muller, Executive Director of the Resources and Technical Services Division of ALA. It is Ms. Muller's recommendation, based on her research and experience, that it makes no difference which scheme is used as long as it is kept current and maintained.

The libraries at the University of Illinois, Champaign Urbana, and at Northwestern use Dewey; you may wish to contact them directly for further opinion.

Enclosed is the listing of books on Dewey Decimal Classification from the 1988 Subject Guide to Books in Print.

I hope this information will be of assistance to you.

Sincerely,

Phillis M. Wilson

Phillis M. Wilson
Headquarters Library

cc: K. Muller, RTSD

Enclosure

From The Use of Library of Congress Classification, Chicago, American Library Association, 1968.

TABLE I

Excerpts from Three Project Reports

Item	Rochester	South Carolina	Iowa
Years of the project	1927–31	1946–53	1950–51
Volumes reclassed	86,634	56,113	66,207
Titles reclassed	41,616	32,035	24,364
Cost per volume	$0.26	$1.69	$0.45
Cost per title	$0.54	$3.07	——
Costs updated to 1960's:			
Per volume	($0.90)	($3.20)	($0.85)
Per title	($1.80)	($5.80)	——

ATTACHMENT 2

NO. 764. ANNUAL PERCENT CHANGE IN SELECTED PRICE INDEXES: 1960 TO 1985

[Year's averages. Minus sign (-) indicates decrease. GNP = Gross national product. See text, section 15]

YEAR OR PERIOD	CONSUMER PRICES						PRODUCER PRICES					OTHER INDEXES				
	All items	Food	Fuel oil and coal [1]	Gas (piped) and electricity	Rent	Services	Finished goods		Intermediate materials, excl. foods	Crude goods		Implicit price deflator, GNP	Compensation per hour, nonfarm business	Output per hour, nonfarm business	Unit labor costs, nonfarm business	Average hourly earnings, production workers, private nonfarm economy
							Total	Consumer goods		Total	Food					
1960	1.6	1.0	.7	4.1	1.4	3.3	.7	1.0	.1	.4	2.4	1.6	2.5	2.4	.1	2.4
1961	1.0	1.0	2.6	.5	1.3	2.9	.5	1.0	-.1	.4	2.4	1.0	2.5	2.4	.1	2.4
1962	1.1	.8	1.5	-	1.2	2.9	.5	.9	-.1	.4	2.4	1.0	2.5	2.4	.1	2.4
1963	1.2	1.4	1.9	-	1.2	2.9	.5	.9	-.1	.4	2.4	1.0	2.5	2.4	.1	2.4
1964	1.3	1.3	.5	-	1.1	2.8	.3	.3	.1	.6	2.2	1.2	2.5	2.4	.1	2.4
1965	1.7	2.0	2.6	.2	1.0	3.2	1.9	1.9	1.4	3.1	3.5	1.7	3.5	2.4	1.1	3.5
1966	2.9	3.0	3.1	.2	1.3	3.9	3.2	3.4	2.5	4.6	3.9	2.9	3.6	2.4	1.2	3.6
1967	2.9	2.9	3.1	.4	1.6	4.4	1.2	.6	.8	3.4	3.8	2.8	3.6	2.4	1.2	3.6
1968	4.2	3.6	3.1	.9	2.5	5.2	2.6	2.7	2.3	1.5	2.3	3.8	5.8	2.4	3.4	5.8
1969	5.4	5.1	2.4	1.9	3.2	5.9	3.7	3.8	3.4	6.1	4.3	4.8	6.5	2.4	4.1	6.5
1970	5.9	5.5	4.3	4.4	4.2	6.1	3.5	3.1	3.9	3.6	10.2	5.4	6.5	2.4	4.1	6.5
1971	4.3	4.3	9	6.9	4.6	5.5	3.1	3.1	3.6	2.5	10.4	5.2	6.5	2.4	4.1	6.5
1972	3.3	4.8	5.7	6.6	4.6	5.6	3.1	3.1	3.8	2.5	10.4	5.2	6.5	2.4	4.1	6.5
1973	6.2	14.5	14.5	4.8	4.3	4.5	11.1	13.1	4.0	10.9	7.0	5.4	6.5	2.4	4.1	6.5
1974	11.0	14.4	37.8	15.3	5.1	9.3	21.1	20.8	23.8	12.5	20.4	8.1	8.4	2.4	5.9	8.4
1975	9.1	4.5	4.6	16.3	5.1	9.5	15.3	15.6	10.9	36.4	19.6	8.5	8.4	2.4	5.9	8.4
1976	5.8	1.1	5.6	11.4	5.4	8.0	10.8	11.0	10.5	4	2.7	5.8	8.4	2.4	5.9	8.4
1977	6.5	5.3	13.0	12.9	5.1	7.7	4.4	3.7	5.1	2.9	12.4	6.4	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1978	7.7	10.0	5.3	9.0	5.8	8.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	3.2	21.9	6.7	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1979	11.3	10.9	35.1	10.8	7.3	8.0	7.8	7.9	7.0	12.0	14.1	7.0	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1980	13.5	8.6	37.9	17.1	8.8	11.0	11.1	11.8	12.8	17.0	16.5	8.2	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1981	10.4	7.9	21.6	14.6	9.7	15.4	13.5	14.2	12.8	11.0	21.2	9.0	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1982	6.1	4.0	-1.2	13.9	7.6	13.1	9.2	9.0	9.2	5.0	22.1	9.7	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1983	3.2	2.1	-6.0	8.9	5.8	9.0	4.0	3.6	1.4	-2.9	18.0	6.4	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1984	4.3	3.8	2.2	3.8	5.5	8.5	1.6	1.3	1.4	-2.9	18.0	6.4	6.7	2.4	4.2	6.7
1985	3.6	2.3	-3.5	1.7	6.1	8.1	2.1	2.0	2.5	1.3	.3	3.6	3.5	2.4	1.1	3.5
1960-65	1.3	1.4	1.2	.2	1.1	2.0	.9	.5	.4	.2	.5	3.4	3.1	2.4	.7	3.1
1965-70	4.2	4.0	3.1	1.5	2.6	5.1	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.5	2	3.3	3.5	2.4	1.1	3.5
1970-75	6.8	8.6	16.4	9.6	4.5	6.5	9.8	9.7	9.9	9.5	9.2	6.8	7.4	2.4	4.8	7.4
1975-80	8.9	7.7	18.8	12.2	6.9	10.2	8.2	8.3	10.4	11.9	17.2	7.1	6.8	2.4	4.2	6.8
1980-85	5.2	5.9	9.6	14.2	8.1	11.0	8.6	8.8	9.3	5.9	12.8	7.6	6.2	2.4	3.7	6.2
1981-85	5.5	4.6	4.1	12.4	7.3	8.5	6.6	6.3	5.2	2.4	20.0	6.0	5.6	2.4	3.2	5.6
1982-85	5.0	4.4	3.7	10.2	6.8	7.7	4.9	4.6	3.1	2.0	14.8	5.6	5.3	2.4	2.9	5.3
1983-85	5.5	4.0	2.2	8.4	6.7	7.1	3.5	3.2	2.6	1.1	10.9	5.0	5.1	2.4	2.7	5.1
1984-85											5.1	5.4	5.2	2.4	2.8	5.2

Represents zero. [1] Includes bottled gas. [2] Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *The National Income and Product Accounts of the United States, 1929-82* and *Survey of Current Business*; July issues. Index 1982 = 100. [3] PCE = Personal consumption expenditures. See Table 766. [4] Base year for percent change is 1959. [5] Average annual percent change. For explanation of average annual percent change, see Guide to Tabular Presentation.

Source: Except as noted, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review*.

NO. 765. ANNUAL PERCENT CHANGE IN WAGE RATES, COSTS, PRODUCTIVITY, AND FEDERAL BUDGET: 1973 TO 1985

ITEM	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Wage, fringe, and S/L earnings, private:													
Current													
Annual wage changes													
Employment cost index, total	6.5	7.5	9.6	7.2	6.5	6.8	8.3	9.1	9.6	7.5	4.6	4.3	4.1
Wages	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	7.2	7.0	7.3	8.7	9.0	9.4	7.1	4.0	3.8	3.7
Benefits	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	8.1	7.1	8.0	7.7	10.3	9.9	8.3	5.7	5.3	5.0
Annual wage changes	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	6.6	5.6	6.1	8.1	8.0	8.8	6.5	3.5	3.3	3.2
Real wages													
Real spendable earnings	7.9	4.5	6.7	8.4	7.2	6.5	9.0	10.3	10.4	7.7	4.3	3.9	3.8
Real hourly earnings	1.8	2.2	1.4	2.6	2.2	1.8	2.1	1.4	1.8	1.2	.7	.4	.3
Federal Budget: [1]													
Receipts	9.0	12.0	7.8	5.6	13.5	11.7	11.6	13.1	9.4	4.8	6.5	11.2	8.3
Outlays													
Current	11.3	14.0	8.0	6.5	13.3	12.4	16.2	11.5	11.6	11.1	6.1	2.2	4.2
Constant	6.5	9.5	20.4	11.9	10.2	12.5	9.5	12.4	14.0	10.6	2.8	5.1	4.1
Deficit	7.1	3.8	11.9	16.1	12.2	10.1	5.8	9.1	13.9	13.0	4.1	1.0	3.1

[1] Fiscal year data. See table 478. Source: U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables, Budget of the United States Government, 1987*.

Source: Except as noted, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Monthly Labor Review and unpublished data.

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